



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## FRENCH LITERATURE.

*Lettres inédites de Mme de Staël à Henri Meister*, publiées par MM. PAUL USTERI, Ancien professeur à l'École cantonale de Zurich, et EUGÈNE RITTER, Professeur à la Faculté des Lettres de Genève. Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1903. Pp. viii, 284.

It is well known that, after the death of Mme de Staël, her family fearing lest her reputation might suffer took every precaution to prevent the publication of her letters. Thus it is supposed that the Duchesse de Broglie succeeded in gaining possession of the box containing her mother's letters to Benjamin Constant—epistles which would be of the most piquant interest, but which have without doubt been destroyed.

The excellent *Notice* of Mme de Staël by her cousin, Mme Necker de Saussure, was, for the same reason, edited with the greatest care and criticized by the most intimate friends of the family. Mme Rilliet-Huber, the life-long friend of Mme de Staël, says in a letter to Henri Meister: "Si vous aviez été ici, vous auriez fait partie du conseil épuratoire. Il importait trop à la mémoire de celle qui a tenu une si grande place pendant sa vie, que cette notice dise presque tout, et pas tout."

The archives of Coppet are, even to this day, jealously guarded against too curious investigators.

However, as Sainte-Beuve long ago remarked, it is only by repeated victories that one triumphs over posterity, and the best thing that can happen to keep the memory of an author green is to have "deux ou trois de ces retours et de ces réveils magnifiques qui étonnent les générations nouvelles, qui les convainquent qu'un mort puissant est là, redoutable encore jusque dans son ombre et son silence."

Already in 1862 Saint-Beuve remarked that the renown of Mme de Staël had suffered on account of the unwillingness of the family to allow the publication of any letters. In that year, however, the family did make an exception in favor of the letters written to the Grand Duchess Louise, because they corrected some generally accepted misstatements in regard to their author.

Since then Mme de Staël has had, in spite of the precautions of her family, more than one such awakening, and, although a few things have been printed which a generous editor would have omitted, we have now a truer and withal a more favorable picture than formerly of this remarkable woman who during her life was exposed to the severest criticism, partly on account of her prominent position and partly through her own imprudence and impulsiveness.

Thus in 1887 were published the *Journal intime* and a collection of letters by Benjamin Constant, and the next year appeared *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à sa famille*, with an introduction by Mme Menos, both of which publications awakened as much interest in Mme de Staël as in her less renowned friend. Then followed the great work on Mme de Staël by Lady Blennerhassett, and Albert Sorel's excellent volume in the *Grands Écrivains*.

Since that time the reviews have frequently contained articles on Mme de Staël. A year ago was published M. Paul Gautier's volume on Mme de Staël and Napoleon, of which I hope soon to speak more in detail, and, last autumn, the *Lettres inédites de Mme de Staël à Henri Meister*. Mention might also be made of the two volumes by Mlle Lucie Achard: *Rosalie de Constant, sa famille et ses amis*, in which there are many interesting references to Mme de Staël. Some of the letters to Meister were published by Lady Blennerhassett, but they were not always correctly dated. In fact, one great difficulty in editing letters by Mme de Staël is that the dates usually have to be supplied. "Je n'ai jamais vu," said Sainte-Beuve, "une aversion du chiffre et du millésime aussi complète que dans les lettres de cette femme supérieure."

We must bear in mind that Mme de Staël usually wrote her letters hurriedly. She says herself: "Depuis que j'ai visé tout ouvertement à la célébrité, je n'ai plus donné aucun soin à mes lettres." Accordingly, as Mme Necker de Saussure remarked, "elle n'y mettait que l'esprit qu'elle ne pouvait s'empêcher d'avoir." That, however, was quite sufficient to make these letters very interesting.

Mme de Staël was too passionate, too impatient

to sit down and compose letters à la Mme de Sévigné or Voltaire, and would not write letters unless she had a special reason for so doing.

A circumstance which renders this series of letters especially interesting, is the fact that they extend over a period of thirty years and thus enable us to follow their author throughout her eventful career. M. Ritter (for the editing is chiefly his work) has accordingly divided the letters into six chapters, corresponding to the historical periods. The first letters date from the time of Louis XVI, and the last from the Restoration.

To an uninitiated, the task of editing letters would seem comparatively easy. In reality, it is often an extremely difficult thing to do well; nor is the labor spent upon it always apparent except to those who are acquainted with the correspondence in question.

M. Ritter has had a very difficult task to perform, but the copious notes, the brief explanations here and there, the extracts from other letters and from books bearing on the question in hand, show with what excellent judgment and scholarship the work has been performed. It is, like all the books of this savant, who has just celebrated his thirtieth anniversary as professor in the University of Geneva, an exact, painstaking and scholarly piece of work.

The portion of the book that will be read with most interest by those who have not paid especial attention to the career of Mme de Staël, is the excellent *Notice* of Henri Meister, the recipient of these letters.

Meister was one of those German Swiss, like Bât de Muralt and Bonstetten, who successfully adopted the French language. His father was an enlightened and broad-minded Protestant pastor; Henri also prepared for the ministry and took orders before he had completed his nineteenth year.

On a journey to Geneva, which he took soon afterwards, he won the friendship of Paul Moulton, the liberal Protestant minister, the intimate friend of Rousseau and one of the correspondents of Voltaire. Through Moulton he was enabled to visit Rousseau, whom he accompanied on a long tramp in the mountains. He also presented himself at Ferney, where he was kindly received by

Voltaire, who said to him among other things: "Soyez toujours tolérant: c'est une des premières vertus des ministres de l'Évangile."

Of greater importance than these two celebrities for the future of Henri Meister, were two ladies whose acquaintance he made in Geneva, Mme de Vermenoux and Mlle Suzanne Curchod. Less than a year afterwards he received a letter from Moulton, offering him the position of tutor of the eight-year-old son of Mme de Vermenoux, which position had hitherto been filled by Mlle Curchod, who had just married M. Necker, the wealthy banker and the future minister of Louis XVI.

After some hesitation Meister accepted the offer, and from then on he was an interested spectator and commentator of the great events of those stirring times.

After a stay in Paris of eighteen months, Meister and his young pupil spent two years in Switzerland. The occasion for their leaving Paris was the love which was springing up between Meister and Mme de Vermenoux; this love-story began with a rose-leaf plucked from the lady's lips and ended, years after the death of Mme de Vermenoux, in the placing of a tin-box containing her heart in the coffin of Henri Meister.<sup>1</sup>

In 1768 Meister had secretly printed a little essay *De l'origine des principes religieux* in which he tried to prove that religious ideas have a human and natural origin. Diderot was much pleased with the work and Voltaire prophesied the author a bright future. In Zürich, on the other hand, the book, being adjudged an attack on religion, was publicly burnt and its author was banished from Zürich forever. Meister at once returned to Paris where he was warmly welcomed by Mme de Vermenoux.

A couple of years later he succeeded Grimm as editor of the *Correspondance littéraire*, the famous manuscript journal by which the courts of Europe were kept informed of the chief political, literary and social events of Paris. For about forty years Meister continued this work which brought him a comfortable livelihood, but no literary reputation. Meister had a fluent pen and published many books and pamphlets, all of which are long since forgotten. The most important was *De la morale*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 9 of these letters and d'Haussonville, *le Salon de Madame Necker*, Paris, 1882, p. 214.

*naturelle*, which had a great success and which Wieland translated into German.

In 1812 Meister was surprised by the publication of five volumes of the *Correspondance* (from 1770-1782) without his consent or knowledge. The work was attributed only to Diderot and Grimm. Meister then determined to continue the publication himself and in 1813 five volumes containing the *Correspondance* for the years 1782-1790 appeared. Meister was too little concerned about his literary reputation to allow his name to appear on the title-page, and it was not until the edition of the *Correspondance* by Maurice Jau-neau, 1877-1882, that Meister's large share in the work became known.

Meister had arrived in Paris just after the birth of Mme de Staël, who was named Germaine for her god-mother, Mme de Vermeux. Mme Necker's friendship for Meister was inherited by her daughter, who had known Meister all her life and after the death of Mme de Staël her children continued in their letters to show their love and respect for the venerable old man.

The most interesting of the letters published in this volume are those written during the reign of terror, when Mme de Staël, having taken refuge in Switzerland, made heroic efforts to enable both friend and foe to escape from Paris. These letters breathe enthusiastic devotion and undaunted courage and reveal to us the great kindness of heart so characteristic of this great woman.

It will be noticed that these letters, written to one much older than herself, although they are always sincere and frank (Mme de Staël could not be otherwise), nevertheless have a more subdued tone than is common with Corinne. Again, the fact that Meister was an admirer of Napoleon caused the letters written during the Empire to show a slight feeling of restraint. Sometimes one is tempted to find fault with Mme de Staël for too often writing merely in order to ask a favor of her old, complaisant friend, without in return taking him fully into her confidence.

On the other hand, in the extremely interesting letters to A. W. v. Schlegel, written in 1813 and printed as an appendix to the letters to Meister, the tone is quite different. Addressing an intimate friend of about her own age, the tutor of

her children, she writes as though she were speaking to him. In these few letters to Schlegel we get a better idea than from the long series to Meister of the real Mme de Staël, that passionate and impulsive woman, ambitious to succeed in literature, in politics and in society, whose whole heart belonged to her friends, but who exacted a like devotion in return, and who, insatiable in her many desires, always eager and indefatigable, too soon exhausted her strength and died worn out by her own energy.

WILLIAM KOREN.

Princeton University.

---

## SPANISH LITERATURE.

*Cuentos Castellanos*, selected and edited, with notes and vocabulary, by MARY D. CARTER and CATHARINE MALLOY. Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1902. Pp. vi, 200.

Teachers of Spanish among us will welcome a good collection of short stories suitable for early reading. One or more are promised us, but none has yet appeared quite up to the desired standard. The present one is exceptionally weak in making good any claims for intrinsic worth. It is composed of eight selections, headed by Valera's *Pájaro Verde*. Most of the remaining seven are of doubtful merit for their purpose, and are chiefly notable for their lack of interest, point, or moral. All but two occur in the Paris volume of *Cuentos Escogidos* ("de los mejores autores castellanos contemporáneos"), published by Garnier: a mediocre source of supply containing some good matter but much more that is thoroughly decadent in theme and tone. The American volume has a critical editorial comment on each of the authors represented, comments containing little of biographical facts and scarcely anything else of interest to the reader. It is a singular coincidence—even if it be an accidental one—that these comments read like free translations, in whole or in part, of the corresponding introductions in the Paris volume.

The editorial workmanship is in keeping with the poor literary taste displayed in the quality of